

Guide To Standing Out in the *Inbox*



 AWeber

The Guide to Standing Out In the Inbox

Your brand has a lot to offer, and its your marketing emails that bring that news to your subscribers. So it's key that every one of your emails gets opened.

But good grief, you get email yourself; you know how it goes. You have a million things to do; you're not going to open anything unless:

- a.) You're already expecting it and looking forward to it's arrival
- b.) You're a really, really big fan of the sender and you want to see what they're up to, or
- c.) You're entertained, amused, shocked or inspired by the little bit of the email you can see in your inbox

The same is true for your subscribers. If you want your emails to get opened, you've got to create one of those scenarios listed above with the tools at your disposal.

Those tools are your **from lines**, your **subject lines**, **snippets** and **preview panes**.

Your from line and subject lines are seen by every subscriber. Your snippets and preview panes are only visible in certain email clients.

While all four aren't likely to be seen together, each of the four are certainly being seen by at least part of your list.

Each one helps to get your emails opened. In this guide, you'll find out just how to stand out in the inbox. And beyond just reading about it, you'll practice it with the worksheets at the end of this document.

When you're ready, print out those worksheets (pages 25-28).

Got them? Great. Let's get started!

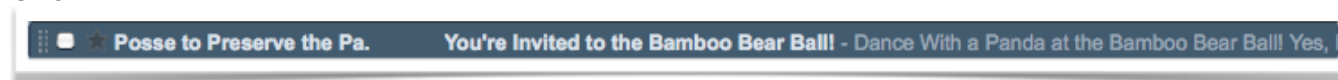
From Lines

Your **from line** is the name or email address your recipients see associated with your email in their inboxes. It appears before your subject line, so it's the first thing many of them will see.

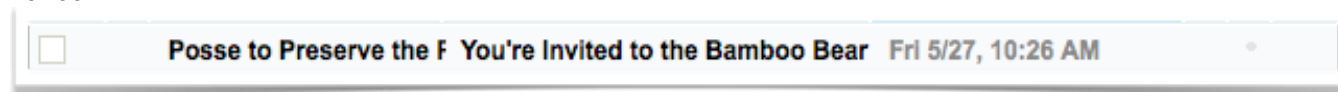
Which means it's contents can have big effect on whether or not your email gets opened.

Take a look at this email from the Posse to Preserve the Pandas in a few different email clients:

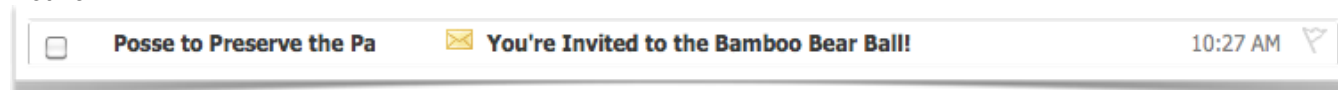
Gmail:



Yahoo:



Hotmail:



iPad:



iPhone:



See how the organization's title in the from line tells recipients who the invitation is coming from – but the length may cause some confusion for those who only remember signing up for something panda-related?

Both the content and the length of your from line are important, so we'll discuss ideas for both of those before getting into the from line you should never, ever use.

What to Put In Your From Line

In your personal email, the from line usually displays your email address or your name, depending on your settings.

It's the same in marketing emails: most from lines appear as either a person's name, the name of the company or a company email address.

If you choose to use an email address in your from line, make sure to choose one that's hosted at your company's domain. Me@mystore.com is much easier for subscribers to recognize (and looks more professional) than me@gmail.com.

If you're using a name, you should choose one that's on target with your brand. If possible, it should be easily for the average subscriber to recognize.

What name will subscribers associate with your business? Usually this will be your company's name, but you may have a widely known executive or spokesperson. Using their name not only lends the email their clout, it establishes a personal vibe.









In Short, Go With Your Strongest Branded Presence

Keep in mind, however, that if you choose to use the name of an individual who is associated with your company, you run a certain risk:

What happens if that person leaves the company? Your established branding leaves with them.

For Example: Brands vs Individuals

Looking at the screenshot of this inbox, it's easy to pick out the emails that come from well-known companies. Ticketmaster, South Beach Diet, Kayak and Lord & Taylor all use their business names to identify their emails.

<input type="checkbox"/>		Ticketmaster	Tickets On Sale & Special Offers for the Week
<input type="checkbox"/>		South Beach Diet Daily	Sleep Better Tonight!
<input type="checkbox"/>		CreditReport.com	Get your 2010 report
<input type="checkbox"/>		KAYAK	KAYAK's Top Travel Deals \$258+ Hawaii Flight Deals, Each Way
<input type="checkbox"/>		leasing@phillyapartme	New Listing!!!
<input type="checkbox"/>		Darryl Walker	2010 Street Fairs Application Forms!
<input type="checkbox"/>		Andrew Maule	Thank You so much Rebecca...
<input type="checkbox"/>		Lord & Taylor	JEGGINGS! It's a trend, not a typo!

But what about Darryl Walker and Andrew Maule; who are they? You may have requested information from their companies, but if you're not familiar with them individually, you won't recognize their messages in your inbox.

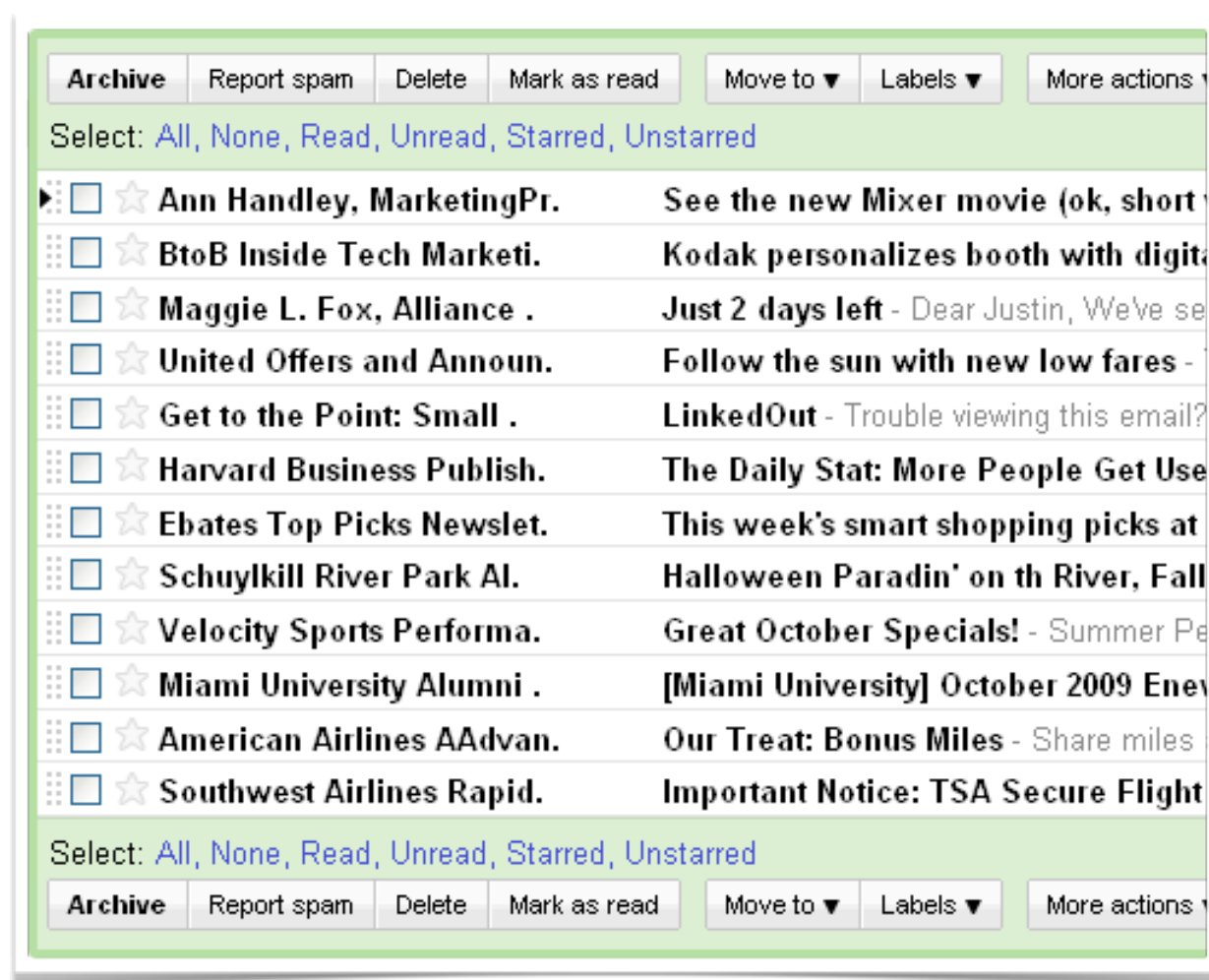
If they had used their business names instead of their individual names, it might be more likely that you would recognize their emails and open them instead of deleting them.

On the other hand, perhaps it's likely that if you're receiving their emails, you've dealt with them personally in the past. If that's the case, using their personal names is the smart way to go.

The Length of Your From Line

You want your from line to be long enough to represent your brand properly. But if it's too long, subscribers won't be able to see the whole thing.

Take this inbox for example. The from lines of all of these messages are too long to be displayed, so they're cut off partway through.



This is a common situation. Depending on your recipients' email providers and screen sizes, your from line just may not fit.

So, How Long Is Too Long?

The following chart shows the number of characters displayed in the from line when testing the from name “John Jacob Jinglehiemier Schmidt” in various popular email clients.

Email Client/OS	“From” Line Displayed	# Characters
Yahoo! (Windows XP)	John Jacob Jinglehiemi	22
Yahoo! (Mac OSX)	John Jacob Jinglehiemi	22
Gmail (XP)	John Jacob Jinglehiemier.	24
Gmail (OSX)	John Jacob Jinglehiemier.	24
Windows Live Hotmail (XP)	John Jacob Jinglehiemie	23
Windows Live Hotmail (OSX)	John Jacob Jinglehiem	21
AOL Webmail (XP)	justinsawebertest@yahoo.	24
AOL Webmail (OSX)	justinsawebertest@yahoo.	24
Microsoft Outlook 2007 (XP)	John Jacob Jinglehiemier Schmidt	32 (all)
Mozilla Thunderbird (XP)	John Jacob Jinglehiemier Schmidt	32 (all)
iPhone Mail	John Jacob Jinglehie...	20 (then the ...)
Gmail (Android mobile phone)	John Jacob Jinglehiemier	24

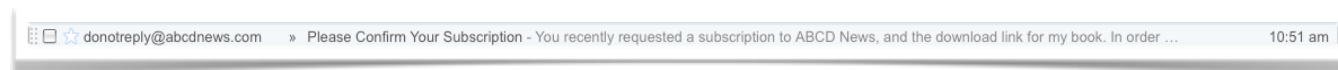
In this test, the maximum number of characters shown was 32.

We recommend 20-22 characters **at most**, so that the majority of your from line is seen by your subscribers.

And with more and more people viewing email on mobile devices with small screens, we recommend going even shorter.

The From Line to Avoid At All Costs: “Do Not Reply”

If you're trying to come up with a new email address to list in your from line, it's **never** a good idea to name it “do not reply.”



Not only are “do not reply” addresses impersonal, they suggest that your company does not want to hear back from its subscribers.

A major benefit of email as a marketing medium is its conversational nature – the potential for a company to actually communicate back and forth with its subscribers, building and strengthening relationships.

Using a “do not reply” address causes the following problems:

- You close yourself off from potential conversations
- You miss out on valuable feedback subscribers may send you
- You risk offending subscribers who contact you and get no response
- You may miss some informal unsubscribe requests (from people who may be very unhappy if they keep getting your emails – hello, spam complaints!)
- Your company appears indifferent to the thoughts or needs of its subscribers

Essentially, a **“do not reply” address takes a two-way marketing medium and forfeits its conversational benefits**, molding it into an online version of TV or billboard advertising.

Even mentioning that subscribers can't reply in the content of your message is a bad idea.

This mailbox is unattended, so please do not reply to this message. If you no longer wish to receive emails from us, [unsubscribe here](#).

It gives off the vibe that you're not interested in hearing from your customers and prospects.

And who wants to purchase from someone who refuses to hear them?

In Summary: Your From Line Tips

- Use your **strongest branded presence** as your from line. Generally, this will be your company name, but may include prominent individuals or spokespeople of your brand.
- Use the **same from line** every time you email to create consistency.
- Keep it **under 22 characters** so it's easy to read in various email clients and devices.
- Never use a **“do not reply”** address. It discourages conversation.

In AWeber

To set your from line in AWeber, go to the My Lists tab, choose List Settings and fill out the “From” name box under Step 1.

Let's Choose Your From Line Now

You've just read over all the things you need to consider when writing your own from line, so what better time to go ahead and write it than right now?

Grab the worksheet entitled, “In Practice: Rethinking Your From Line” and we'll get that taken care of in just a few minutes.

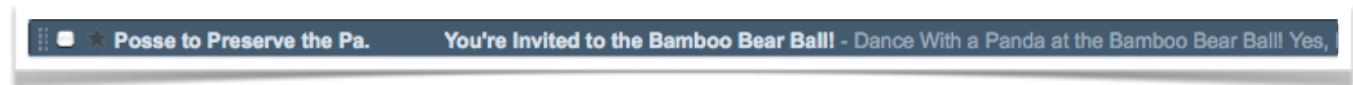
Subject Lines

The subject line of an email requires careful attention. After all, it can powerfully sway a subscriber's decision of what to do with your message: open or delete?

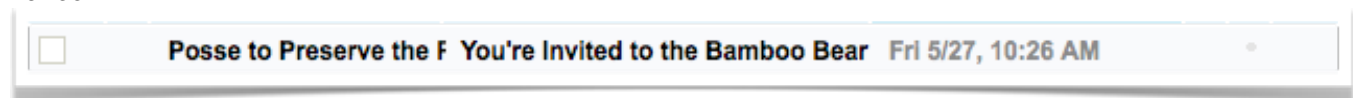
The subject line has two jobs:

- to accurately depict the contents of the message
- to entice the subscriber to open it

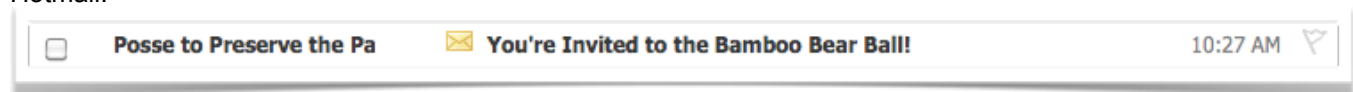
Gmail:



Yahoo:



Hotmail:



iPad:



iPhone:



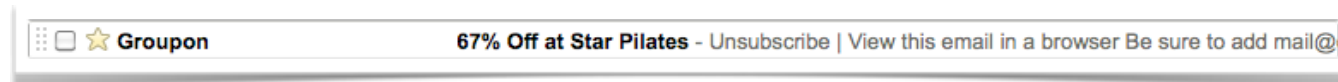
Sadly, there's no magic formula for writing subject lines that are guaranteed opens. A subscriber's choice to open also depends on their expectations (set when they first subscribed), their past interactions with your brand, their own state of busyness and so much more.

But many times, a compelling subject line can sway their decision. If your language and approach to your subject line are not doing the job, you might want to consider trying out one of the following strategies.

Subject Lines By the Numbers

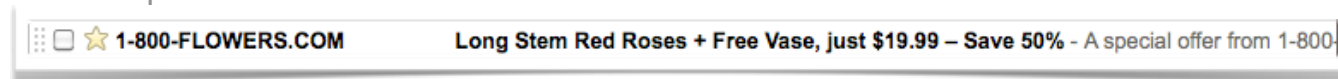
According to [MarketingSherpa's 2010 Email Marketing Benchmark Report](#), the top three types of subject lines that compel subscribers to open emails contain:

1. A discount offer



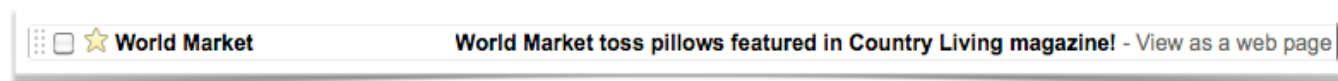
Many times, people sign up for mailing lists with the hope of getting special deals. So when a subject line reveals a deal that's just too good to pass up, the email can draw unusually high response.

2. A free product offer



A free, quality product just doesn't come around that often. So if you're offering one, tell subscribers in the subject line so they don't miss out!

3. A familiar brand name



A legitimate association between your brand and a trusted household name can foster trust and pride among your subscribers. It can also draw curiosity (much like a celebrity sighting), prompting opens.

These subject lines performed best in the MarketingSherpa study, but depending on your audience and your usual brand voice, you may want to try out some different strategies. So here are....

5 More Strategies for Your Subject Line

1. Use Social Proof

Readers are comforted by the knowledge that other people are using your product and getting results. By including that information in your subject line, you're showing subscribers that they can trust you because other people do.

You could say:

Find Out How Michelle Lost 25 Pounds!

See Why Richard Can Stay 3 Extra Days in Cancun for Free

2. Get To the Point

Sometimes the best way to appeal to subscribers is by being straightforward. Avoid fancy language and just get right to it. What information are you sending in your email? If it's an offer, just say so.

You could say:

New Summer Arrivals – 25% off

20% Off This Year's Best Beach Books

3. Introduce a How-To

Subscribers are on your email list because they believe your company or your products can help them in some way. Telling them you can help them accomplish something will compel them to open your email for the information inside.

You could say:

How to Save on Car Insurance

3 Ways to Make Money on eBay

4. Ask a Question

When you are examining the content of your message, think about the questions it answers. Then ask those questions in the subject line.

You could say:

Steal of The Day...Did You Hear?

2 Types of Loans — Which One Do You Need?

This tactic provokes your readers' curiosity – and they have to open to satisfy it!

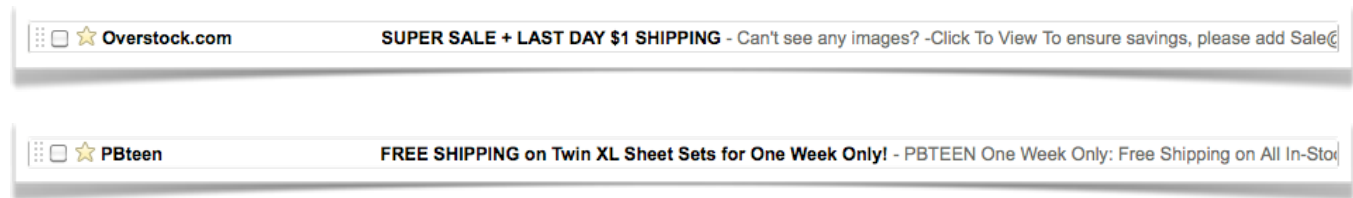
5. Create Urgency

Occasionally, it can help to instill a sense of urgency in your subscribers by giving them a reason to act quickly in response to message.

While you can convey urgency anywhere in your email, the most effective place is the subject line. If your subject doesn't convince them to open, they won't see urgent language used anywhere else!

You Can Build Urgency With:

Expiration dates. These spark action by putting a time sensitive deadline on your offer. Your subscribers know exactly how long they have to open your email before it is no longer relevant or valid.



Discounts. These work especially well for thrifty audiences. Perhaps they like your product, but they are not ready to spend the regular price. By offering a discount in the subject line, subscribers are compelled to open and learn how to save.



Subject Line Writing Resources

How better to write effective subject lines than by learning from the masters? These resources contain straight advice on subject lines from copywriters and email marketers.

How to Write Magnetic Headlines

From Copyblogger, this 11-part series (which interchanges “subject line” with “headline”) addresses SEO keywords and includes 21 proven-to-work subject line templates.

Email Subject Lines: 15 Rules to Write Them Right

Some of these relate your general habits – the way you read a newspaper, for example. Others come into play as you're penning that subject line. Don't miss the list of specific combinations with the word “free” that'll get your email filtered as junk!

How to Write Better Email Subject Lines

The 5 Cs of great subject lines. One of these (if not several) should be present in every subject you write.

Testing Your Subject Line Strategies

Not sure which tactic will work best for your own subject lines, but still want to try a few out?

You can find out what works by [split testing](#): running a controlled experiment that compares several strategies at a time.



To compare them, you'd send out different versions of the same message to portions of your list. Each version would match in everything but the subject line. In each subject line, you'd try out a different strategy.

By analyzing the number of opens you get from each version, you can get a better understanding of what kind of subject lines get the best response from your readers.

In Summary: Your Subject Line Tips

- Your subject should clearly and concisely communicate *why* someone would want to open your message.
- When appropriate, a discount or a free product offer can compel subscribers to open who may not have otherwise.
- You may also be able to increase opens with a subject line that includes social proof, a straightforward offer, a helpful how-to or a question.
- Creating a sense of urgency or using automatic personalization in your subject line can significantly increase opens, but only when used appropriately and sparingly.
- Split testing your broadcasts can help you find the subject line strategies that get you the best results.

In AWeber

To create subject lines in AWeber, open the email you're working on and fill in the blank box above the message editor.

Writing Your Own Subject Lines

Writing effective subject lines is an art, and artistic skills get better with practice. So grab your worksheet that reads, "In Practice: Creating Subject Lines" and let's get started!

Snippets

Did you know that your “from” and subject lines aren’t the only inbox tools you have to convince subscribers to open your [email marketing](#) messages?

Some email programs also display an auto-preview of whatever text they find at the top of your email. It's displayed right after the subject line, this text is commonly called a snippet.

That snippet could be the extra nudge subscribers need to open and investigate further.

The power of the snippet hasn’t yet been proven, so before you make any permanent changes, we encourage you to [split test a few broadcasts](#). To get started, here are four ways to set up a snippet-friendly version in under five minutes.

Extend Your Subject Line

If your emails are topped with a line of text, those words will also display after your subject in the inbox. So choose these words carefully. They’ll act as an introduction to your content, and you can also use them supplement your subject line with a tease of what’s inside. Remember, snippet length will vary depending on each reader’s screen size, so frontload the important words.

Programs this will show in:

- Gmail
- Outlook
- iPhone
- iPad

Relegate Requests to Sidebars

You may have housekeeping items at the top of your email, such as a whitelisting request or a link to unsubscribe.

To keep them from monopolizing auto-preview space, shift them slightly from the main body to the top of a sidebar. They’ll still be easily accessible, and they’ll give you room to put snippet-worthy text where it needs to go.

Programs this will show in:

- Gmail
- Outlook
- iPhone
- iPad



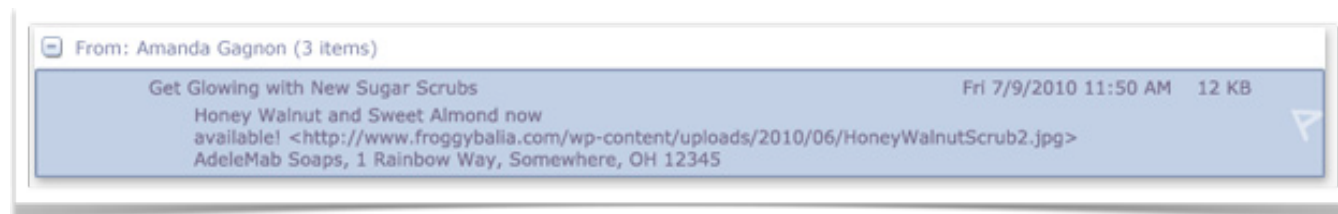
Snippet-ize Your Images

Your message may be designed with a logo, header or other image at the top. These won't show in a snippet, but if you set [alt text](#), some programs will show that instead.

So write this text in a way that serves **two purposes**. It will need to stand in for the picture in case images don't display, and it should also be able to pick up where your subject line leaves off.

Programs this will show in:

- Gmail
- Outlook



Viewed in Outlook

A Secret Strategy: Slip It In

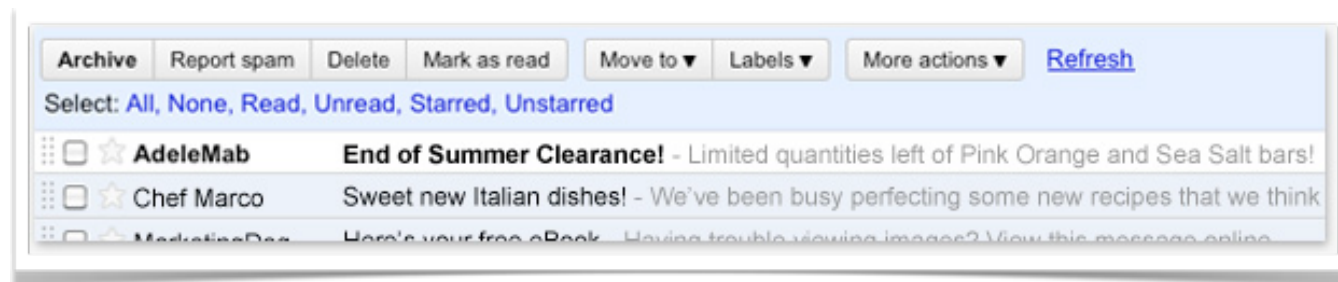
It's possible that you're thinking, "These ideas don't work for me. I don't want text or an image at the top of my design, and I don't want to move anything. Can't my snippet just disappear once the email is opened?"

Actually, in some places it can. There's an easy way to make a snippet that doesn't show in your email. The mechanics? Assign alt text to a tiny image – then render it invisible by matching it to your background color.

If you'd like more specific directions, they're available [here](#).

Programs this will show in:

- Gmail
- Outlook



Viewed in Gmail

Test It Out!

Send your originally planned broadcast to half your list and a snippet-friendly version to the other half. Do you notice any changes in engagement?

If you do, you'll know to start planning for snippets in every send.

In Summary: Your Snippet Takeaways

- If there's a chance that a good percent of your audience is reading your emails in Gmail or Outlook, or on iPhones or iPads, you'll want to be mindful of what makes it into their snippet space.
- The snippet is pulled from whatever comes first in the email – a preheader, a header or the “alt” text from an image.
- You can create an “invisible” snippet by taking advantage of the “alt” text on a 1-pixel image that matches the background of your email.
- Remember that screen size will effect how much of the snippet shows, so front-load the key words.

In AWeber

To set a snippet in Aweber, download [this image](#), then upload it to your site or an image hosting program.

Then, open the email you want to apply the snippet to, choose the HTML side of the editor and paste this code after the opening body tag (the first time you see <body> appear):

```

```

Make sure to replace the text in parenthesis with the proper URL and your snippet text!

Practicing Snippet Writing

It can take some trial and error to get the hang of writing snippets that nicely connect your subject line with your header.

Let's those early errors out now, shall we? Use the worksheet titled “In Practice: Writing Front-loaded Snippets.” After a few tries, you'll be ready for the real thing.

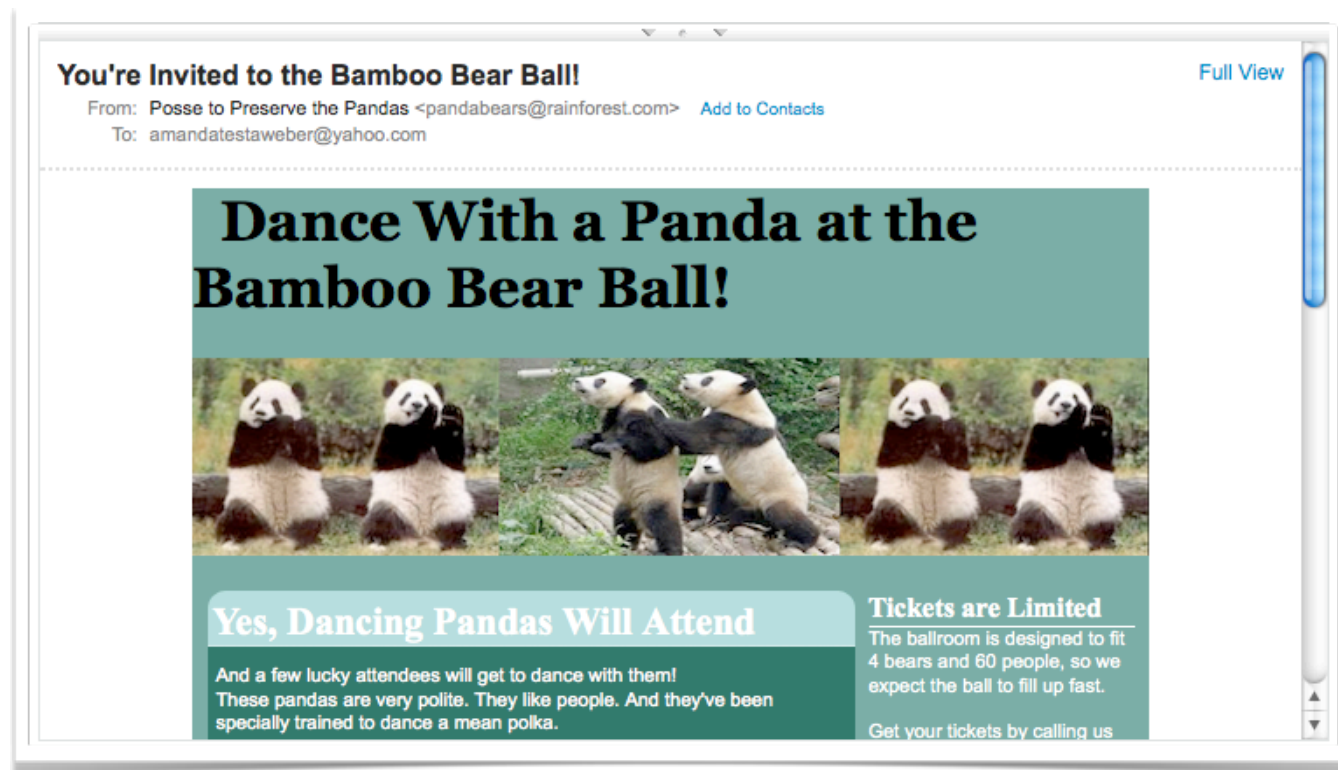
Preview Panes

Could you engage over half your subscribers better with a simple design adjustment?

If you send business-to-consumer (B2C) emails, about 53% of your subscribers first see your emails in a **preview pane**.

If you send business-to-business (B2B), the number is even higher (around 80%).

The preview pane is part of the inbox in some email clients. It lets users peek at part of their emails to decide whether or not to open them.

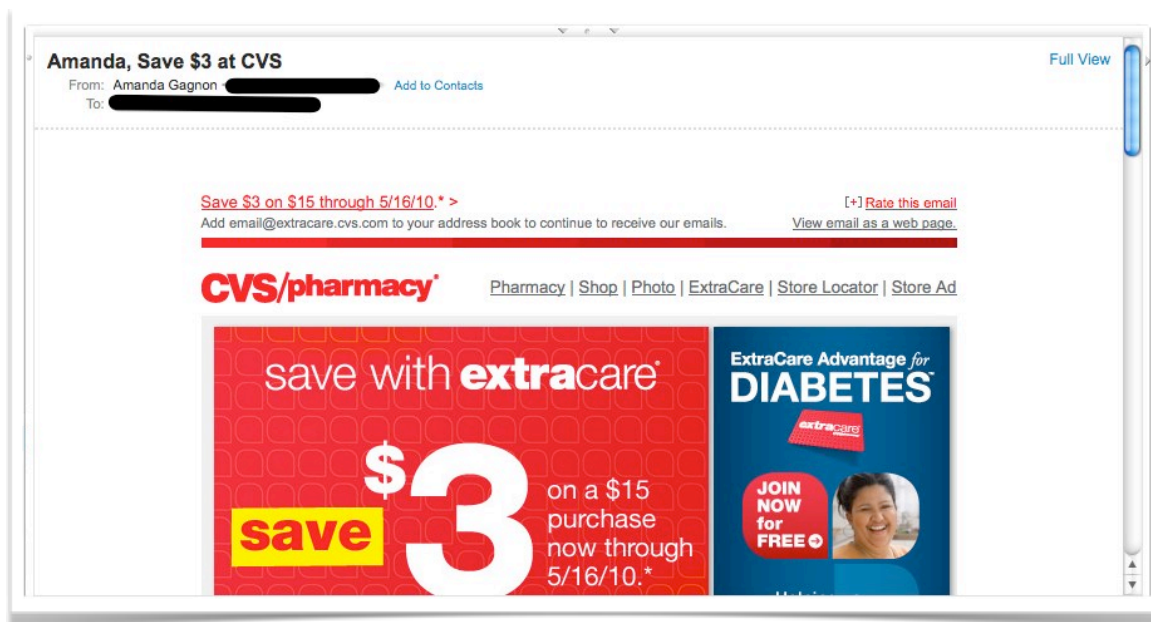


If those few inches of space don't entice previewers to open, they'll simply ignore or delete your message. Don't let that happen! Get the corner on the preview pane market with these easy design changes.

* Preview pane stats according to Marketing Sherpa's [Best Practices in Email Marketing handbook](#).

What You're Working With

Some preview panes, like Yahoo's shown here, show a horizontal strip of your email.



Others, like Microsoft Outlook's, display [vertically](#).



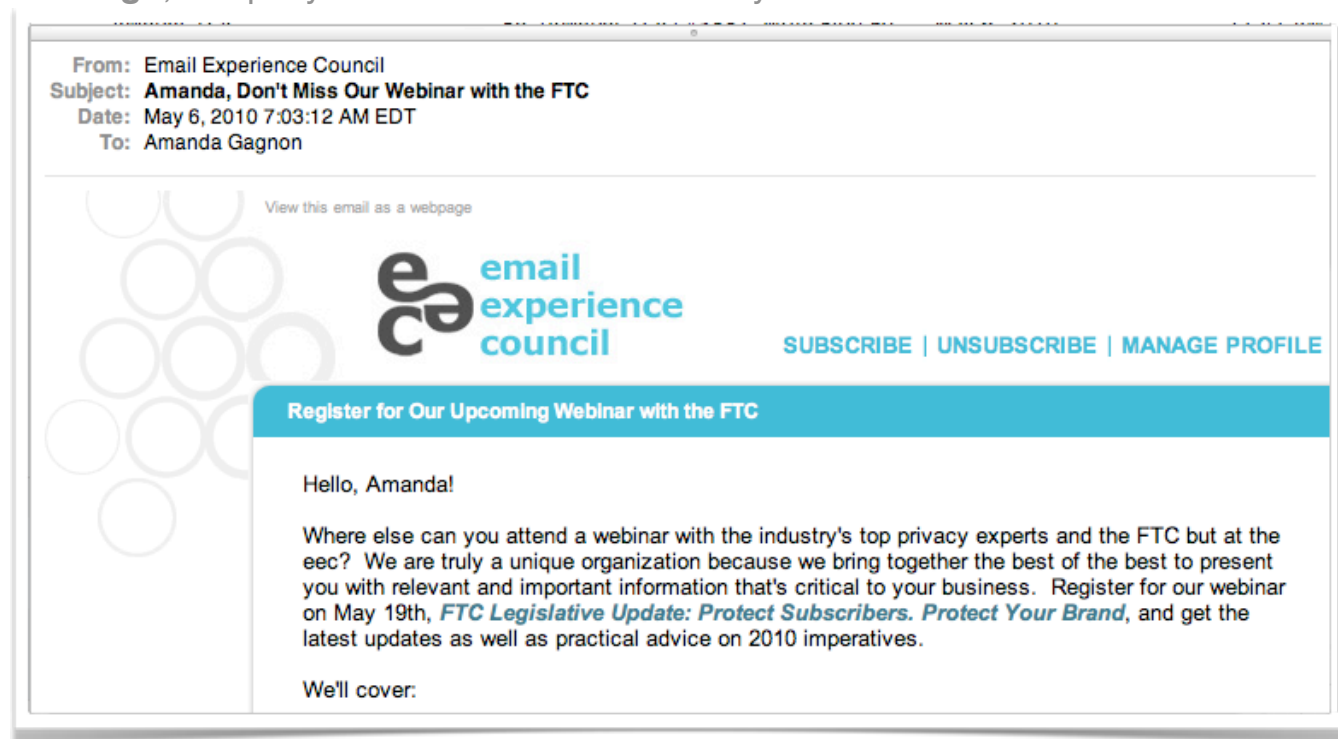
How To Take Advantage of Preview Pane Space

To accommodate both horizontal and vertical panes, fill the **top left** of your message with items that snap previewers to attention.

(As an added bonus, your email will be more [mobile-friendly](#) as well!)

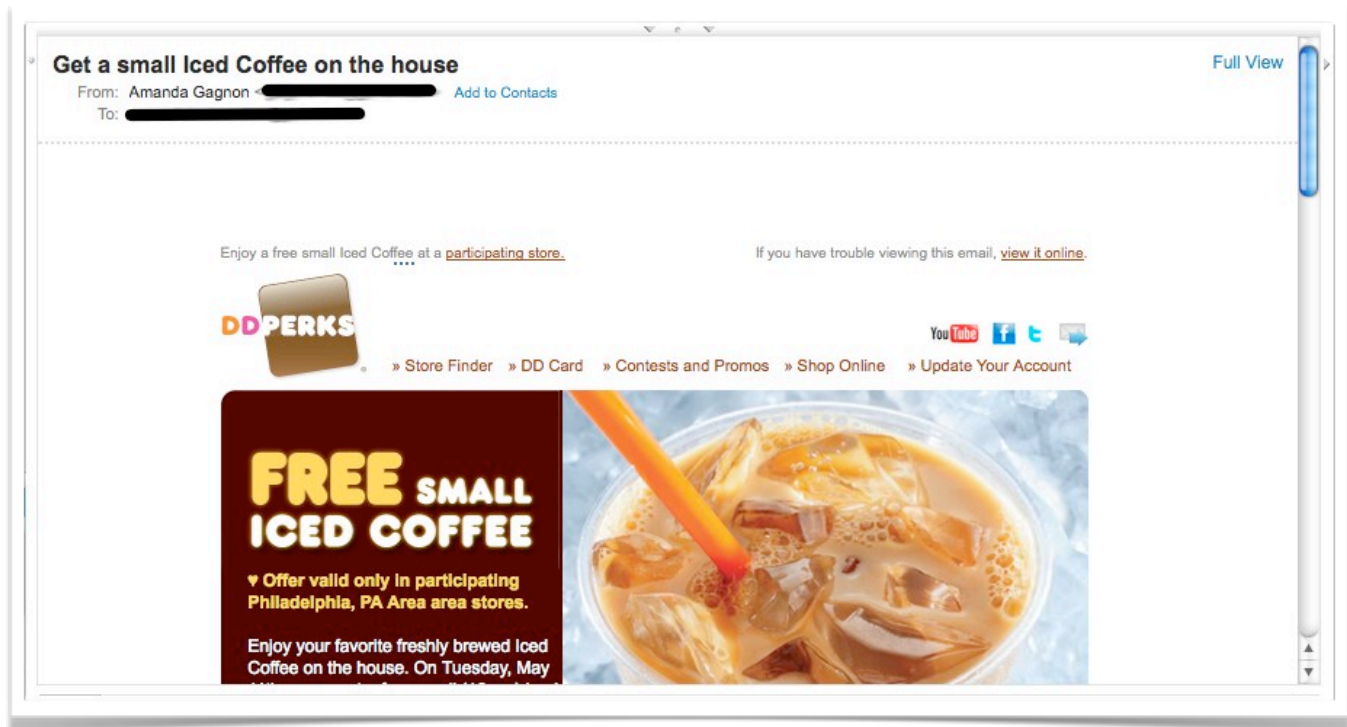
Make sure to include:

Your **logo**, company name or other indication of your brand.

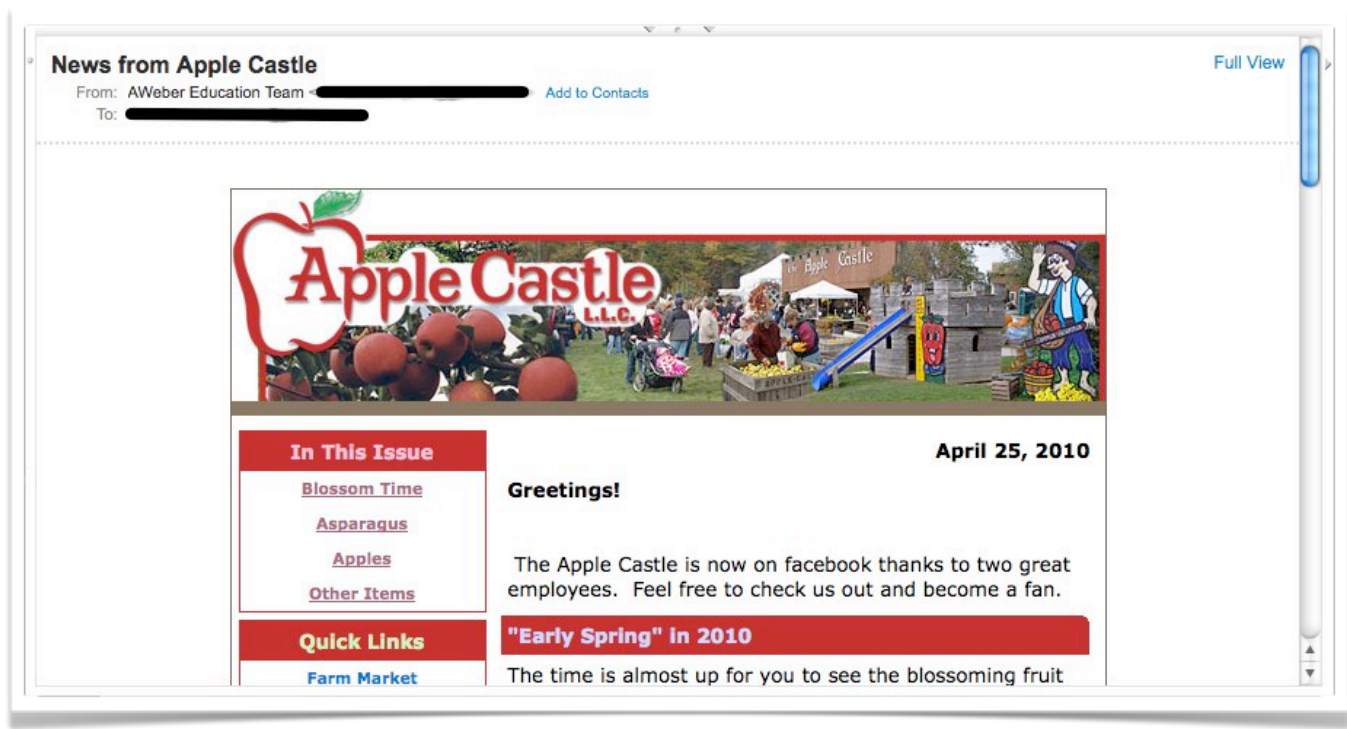


This is especially important if your subject line and from line aren't strongly recognizable. Subscribers are far more likely to open emails from senders they know and trust.

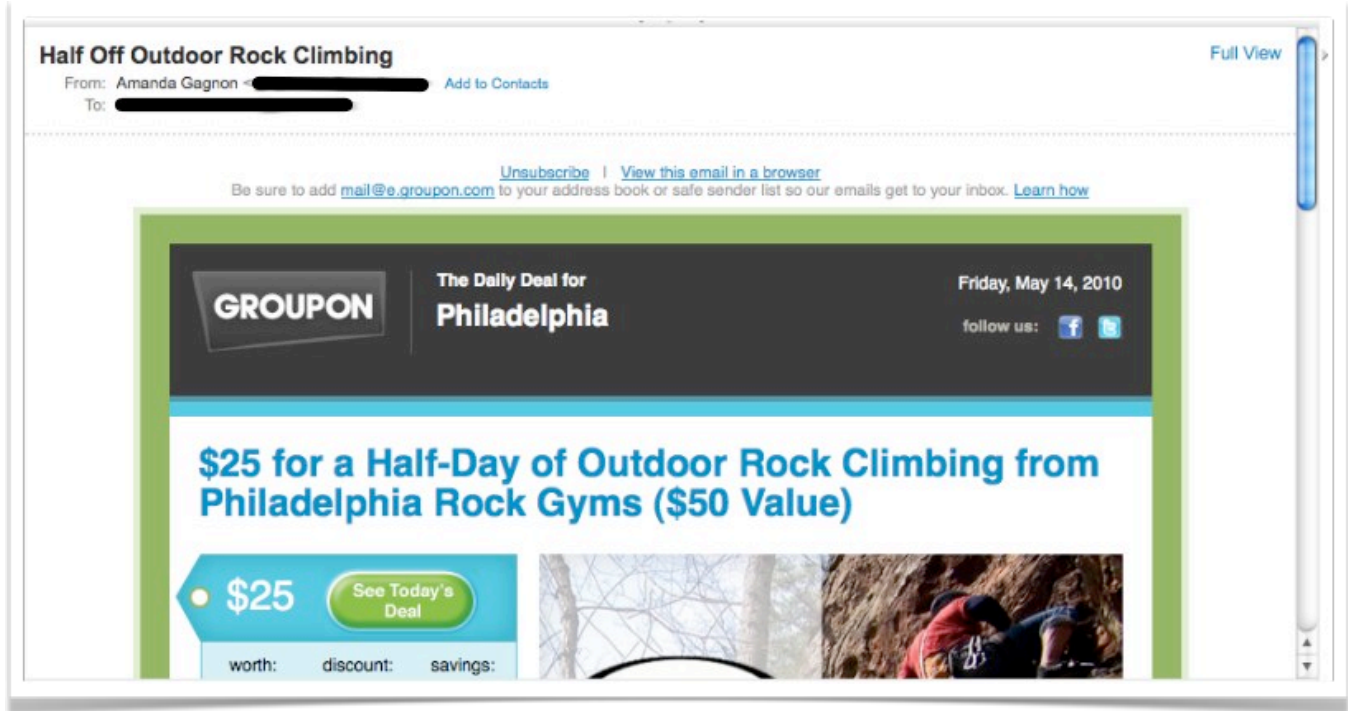
Compelling copy. Hook subscribers with a strong offer or interesting tease near the top – don't let them slip by unnoticed!



A table of contents, if you have enough content. Any one of your article titles could grab readers from the preview pane, so make them all available.

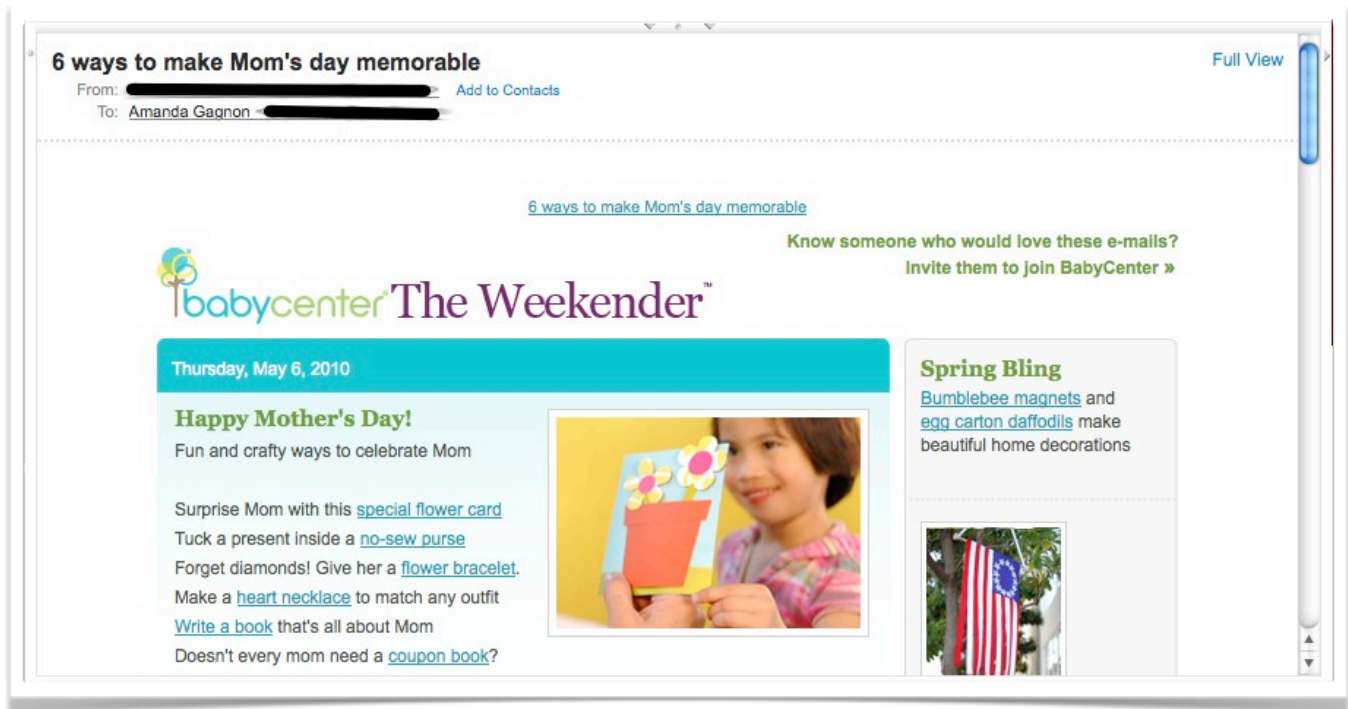


The **call to action**. Some viewers may feel they don't have time to read your email, but your call may be to an action they like. Providing it in the preview pane lets them take action immediately.



Fitting all this in the top of your email can be tough, depending on your design.

You can avoid unsightly cramming with this trick: a **side column** lets two items exist in harmony near the top.



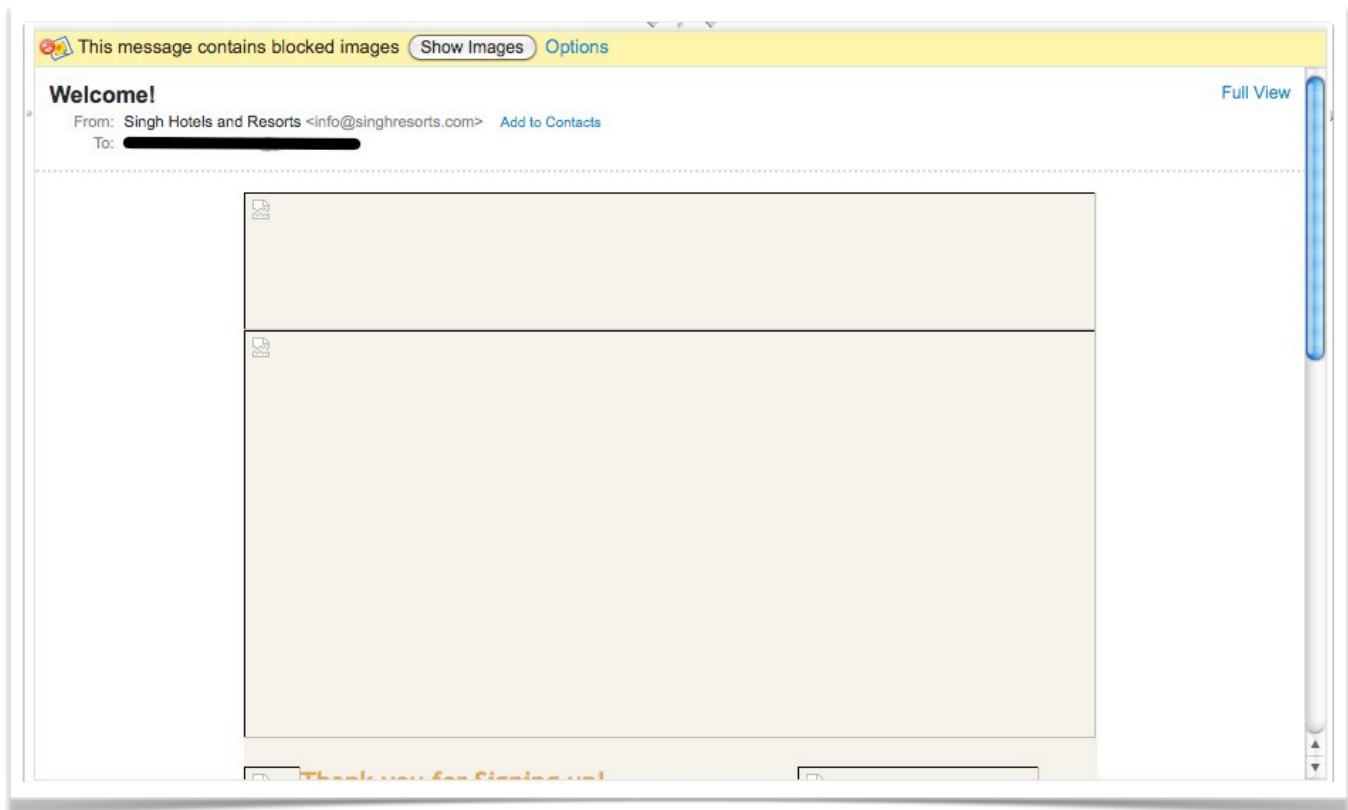
What to Avoid When Designing for Preview Panes

When filling the top with sticky content, you may need to make room by removing less compelling items.

Make sure these common culprits aren't hijacking precious preview-friendly real estate:

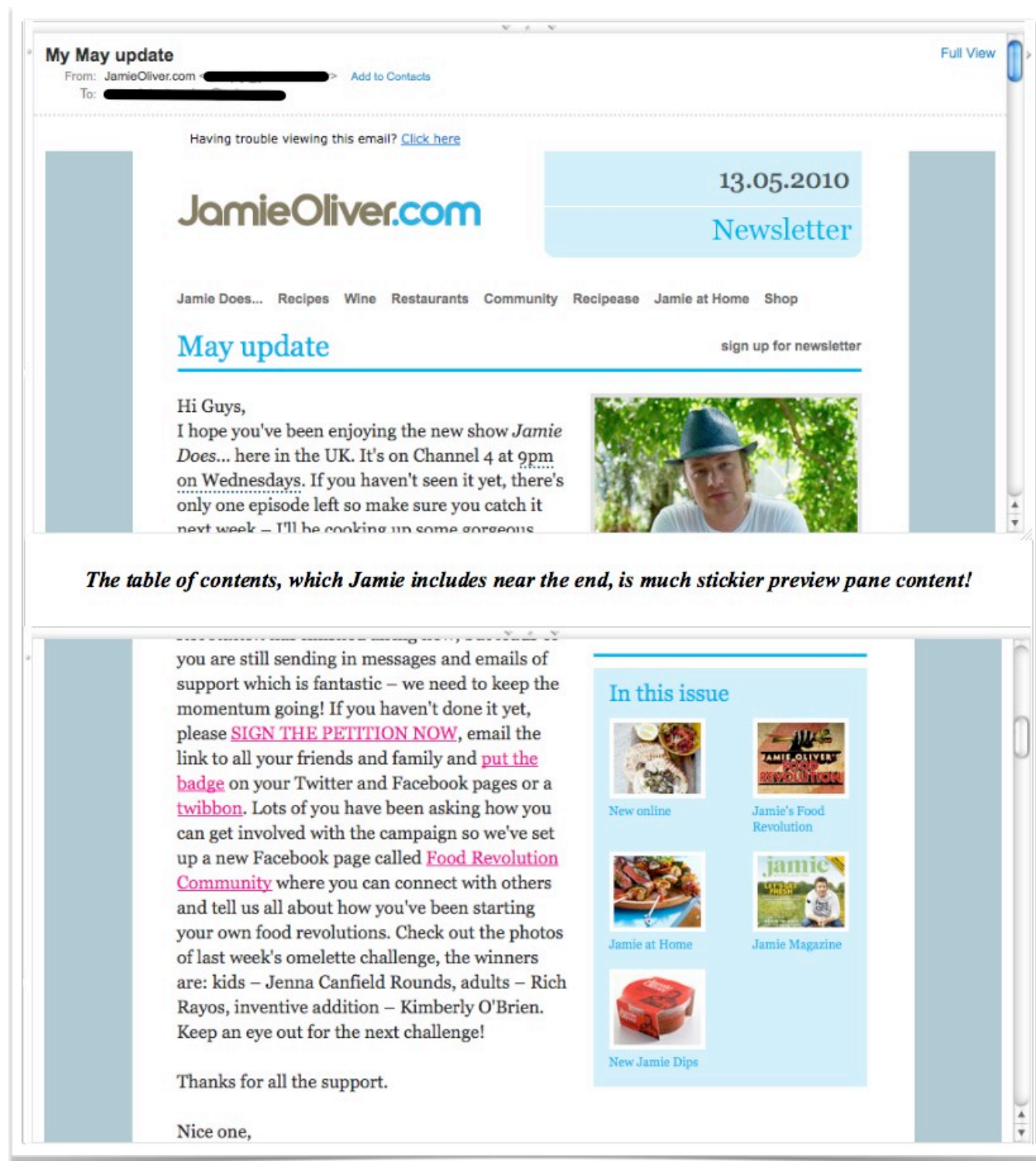
Large images or headers. These drain the efficiency of your design for three reasons:

- If images are turned off, they'll appear as blank space.
- If they take too long to load, readers may just move on.
- If they show up, but don't create the desire to find out more, they'll waste space where you could put more compelling content.



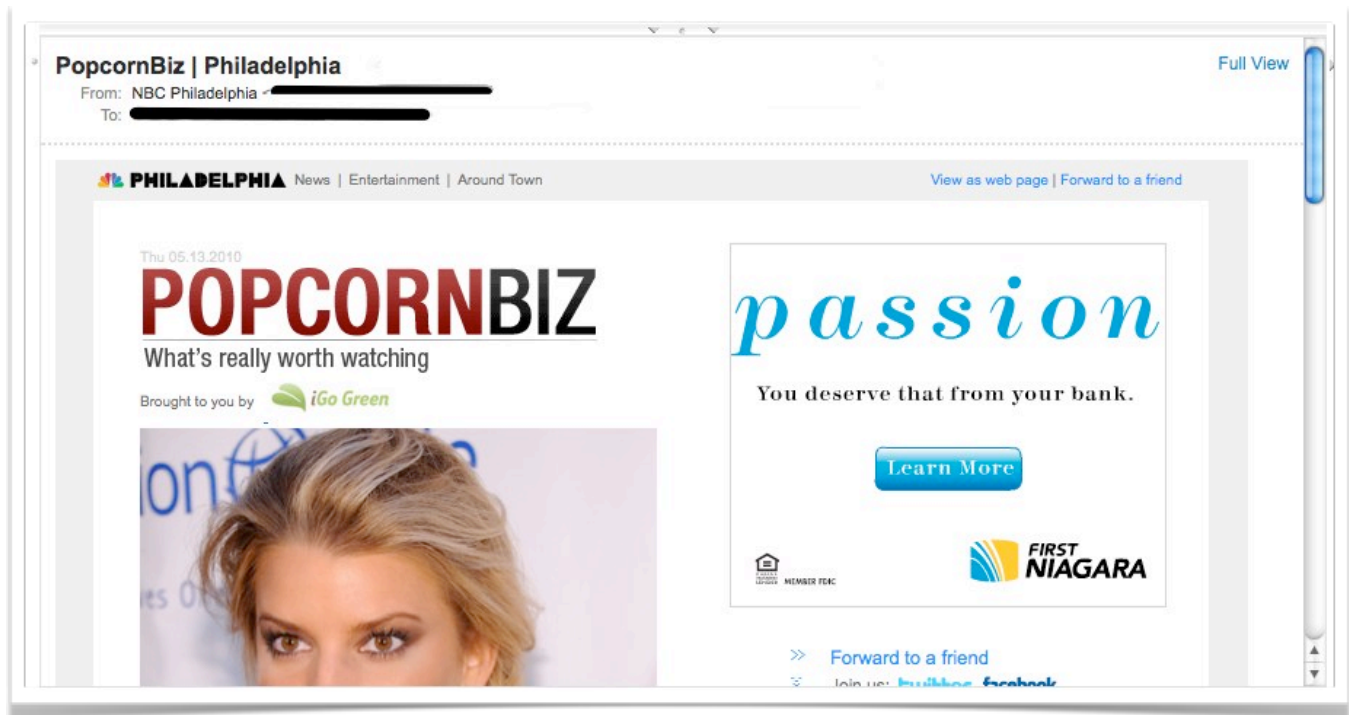
Too many navigation links.

A row of links that mirror the tabs on your web site can be very helpful for readers, providing many opportunities to click back to your site. But they can get in the way of more compelling items. Consider shrinking them, reducing how many you use, or listing them across the bottom of your message instead.



Ads.

Place them elsewhere, unless you want your previewers to click through to your advertisers' sites instead of your own.



You may be thinking, “This is really going to change our design. Is it worth it?” As always, you can run tests to find your answer.

Think about which of these changes might be most effective in your own campaign, then [split test your broadcasts](#) to monitor the results.

In Summary: Your Preview Pane Tips

- Think carefully about what content to put in the top left of your emails – it should entice a reader to open the message to see the rest
- Keep large images (unless carefully chosen to encourage those opens), navigation links and ads out of the top of your emails.
- Consider positioning your call to action at the top of your email for readers who want to click straight through from the preview.

Designing for preview panes in AWeber is the same as with any other program.

Just spend some time carefully questioning what content you can put in the top left of your email that will catch eyes and encourage the reader to open the rest of the message.

Practicing Preview Pane Design

You can (and should) consider preview panes any time you're creating a new email. Let's start getting you in that habit right now.

You'll want the sheet that says, "In Practice: Planning for Preview Panes" for this one.

Tying It All Together

After you work through this document, you should have a recognizable, approachable from line, a collection of catchy subject lines and several ideas for emails that present well in snippets and previews.

As you keep practicing ways to present well in the inbox, you'll develop a deeper understanding of how these parts work together. By taking advantage of the relationships between them, you'll be able to watch their effectiveness multiply.

Yours will be the email that stands out in the inbox, the one that catches people's eyes and draws their cursors like a magnet 'til they click to open.

And once they open – then what?

You'll have to check out our other guides to find out.

In Practice: Rethinking Your From Line

Let's do a little exercise to make sure you're using the best possible from line to represent your brand in the inbox.

First, what name or email address currently appears in your from line? Write it here:

Now, let's explore your other options. Write down your:

Company name:

Owner or CEO's name:

Mascot's name, if you have one:

Spokesperson's name, if you have one:

Generic company email address:

Would any of those potential from lines be more authoritative, approachable or recognizable?

And which is most important when it comes to representing your brand?

Write your final choice for a from line here:

In Practice: Creating Subject Lines

The best way to start cranking out those perfect subject lines is (of course) by practicing first. So let's do a bit of that right now.

Take a look at the last broadcast you sent out (or the last follow up you created, if you don't write broadcasts). Write its subject line here:

Now, choose three of the strategies discussed above that mesh well with the ways you try to present your brand. (For example, if you pander to the prosperous, skip the discount-related options.)

discounts / a free product offer / your brand name
social proof / getting to the point / a how-to / a question
an expiration date / a limited-time discount

Take that subject line you've got written above, and rewrite it using each of those three strategies:

There you have it: three fresh, new subject line templates. You'll just need to tweak each one to accurately reflect the content of whatever email you're sending.

In Practice: Writing Front-loaded Snippets

Go back into your email marketing account and grab three more of your recent subject lines. Write them here:

Now, write a line of text to supplement each subject line in the snippet area. You can provide details, mention secondary content or strengthen an offer – whatever the situation calls for.

Very nice! You now have three solid snippets. To take things one step further, try rewriting them so the most important words are toward the beginning, so they're more likely to be visible even with a small window size.

Perfect. You've practiced, and you're now prepared for snippet production.

In Practice: Planning for Preview Panes

It's all very well to talk about moving compelling content to the top and left, but what would that look like in your own emails?

Let's find out. Open a message you've recently sent, and take a good look at it.

Can any of these items be moved out of the top or left?

- An unnecessarily large header or bland image
- An ad
- Site navigation links

Can any of these items be added to the top or left to grab attention?

- An eye-catching picture
- An appealing call to action
- Compelling text that leaves the reader curious for more
- A table of contents

Take a moment to roughly sketch out what your email would look like with those changes:

Congratulations! You've just optimized an email for preview panes!

Moving Forward

With the information and ideas you have here, you'll be able to put together the most compelling email presentation in the inbox. When you're ready to explore other ways to make your emails even more effective, come find us on our site or social pages!



Stop by [Inbox Ideas](#), our blog.



Follow our [Twitter feed](#) for the latest marketing links.



Watch our [YouTube videos](#) for helpful how-to's.



Become a fan on [Facebook](#) to interact with other marketers.

We have lots of helpful tips and advice ready for you. Can't wait to see you there!